

Doing Good Like A Medicine

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[0 : 00] In Proverbs chapter 17 we read at verse 22, A many heart doeth good like a medicine, but a broken spirit drieth the bones.

This is probably not so much a reference to how one is feeling in and of oneself, as possibly a reference to the kind of people that you occasionally do meet, whose heart is so filled with joy and cheerfulness that they just do you good just to meet them.

I remember a colleague of mine when I was training for the ministry, and sometimes if there were events at the end of term or whatever, wives would come to along with those who were married, obviously would bring their wives to these events.

I remember him saying that his wife had mentioned to him that there was one person in the faculty there that every time they met them that you came away feeling better because you'd encountered them.

And of course it's a lovely thing to say about somebody. And I remember in our previous congregation there was a lovely lady who was exactly like this, a many heart that doeth good like a medicine.

[1 : 11] Every time when she was there at the prayer meeting or every time in church or every time you saw her, she was always so cheerful and always so full of a quiet joy, not sort of a cheesy, green, kind of shallow, kind of always happy, clappy all the time, but this kind of quiet cheerfulness and joy, always upbeat, always lifted your spirit.

And I remember one time we sent a little card to her just to say how much, I appreciated how much she was always like this and did you good every time you met her. And obviously she was pleased to get it, but it seemed genuinely surprised.

Those who have this gift in them would appear not always to know or to realise it. A merry heart doeth good like a medicine. The other half of that verse though, of course, is, but a broken spirit drieth the bones.

And when the Bible speaks about bones, it often talks about some marrow in the bones, some moistness in the bones, healthy bones, a well moistness, sort of full of marrow and sort of meatiness and sort of strength, but to be dried and brittle like a skeleton in the desert.

That's when it says a broken spirit drieth the bones. And you'll notice these two things are both here in the same verse. There is a contrast here. There is the joyful person, or perhaps the time when one may be filled with joy or cheerfulness, there is one's self and feel like it's a tonic, you know, a merry heart doeth good like a medicine, but a broken spirit drieth the bones.

[2 : 42] They're both there because they are both aspects of real life. And one of the things about the Bible, and it's true in the Psalms and throughout Scripture as well, is that the Bible is, we might say at times, brutally realistic about the reality of life.

There are times of absolute brokenness. There are even spiritual times of darkness, and the most ardent believer and most faithful saint can go through extremely dark nights of the soul.

And the Bible doesn't pretend otherwise. Indeed, it's been quite interesting, I read in recent months in the monthly record, about some of those who are the most keen advocates for the kind of music and hymns and throughout the free church will be the first to say, you know, some of the kind of shallow choruses that there are nowadays that are always victorious, always triumphant, and everybody has to be happy all the time, and always clappy victory kind of thing, and that's just what Christianity is about, always winning the victory, always coming out on top, and Jesus just makes you glad all the time.

And they're the first ones to say, those who would favour that hymns and music and so on, and they say, look, this just doesn't meet the need of the human soul. And they would say, you know, you need to have the Psalms, you need to have them too, because the Psalms are full of this reality of at times the brokenness of the soul, at times the darkness, that sometimes just makes you want to tear your enemy limb from limb, but instead of physically actually doing it, you bring that need or that urge or that all-too-human desire, and you bring it to the Lord, and you lay it down before him.

Sometimes you see people will say, oh, things like Psalm 137, about wanting to dash baby's heads against the stones and so on, how can that be inspired by God? That is sub-Christian, that is terrible, we can't possibly have that or sing that.

[4 : 38] But what is the psalmist saying? What he's actually saying here in Psalm 137 is clearly, having witnessed this kind of atrocity against his own people, by the enemy and by the oppressor, little infants being literally dashed to death against the stones, that is what puts it in his heart, and if you want to say, just wait till it's done to them.

But we don't find anywhere the Lord approving that, or saying, yes, off you go, and dash the little kids' heads against the stones. But the psalmist is bringing it to the Lord, all his dark urges, all the thirst for revenge, instead of acting it out, instead of living it out, he brings it to the Lord, and lays it down, and pours it out, and mercifully, it is written down for posterity and for our instruction, to show us, yes, of course, believers do feel like this at times.

There is that element, even within the most sanctified, that just longs for revenge on their enemies, or just is conscious of the times they fail, or the times they sin.

So a broken spirit dryeth the bones. And if we were to turn back, for example, a page or two, we'd see in chapter 15, at verse 13, for example, when it says, A merry heart maketh a cheerful countenance.

Yes, it does. But by sorrow of the heart, the spirit is broken. And again in chapter 18, at verse 14, if we were to turn the page, you get similar sentiments.

[6 : 12] The spirit of a man will sustain his infirmity, but a wounded spirit who can bear. I remember times, particularly in my teens, when that particular verse really spoke to me, a wounded spirit who can bear.

If you're going through a dark stage, a difficult time, it just expresses it perfectly. The Bible is realistic about the difficult times that we go through.

That's because it is a real life book from a real life living God. Because the gospel and this relationship with the Lord is not simply about sort of wandering happily along the sunshine shore.

It is not simply about a fair weather religion or faith or relationship. It is rather a reality for all of life, a relationship to see through all the difficult times.

You know, of course, when you hear a wedding service, for example, the bride and the groom, of course, are meant to take each other for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health.

[7 : 14] Basically, the good times and the bad. Nobody gets to just say, yeah, well, as long as they're healthy and rich and at times they're okay, well, then I might money them for that. No, you've got to take the rock with the smooth.

You've got to face reality together. And there will be difficult times. There will be dark days. There'll be money troubles. There'll be job problems. There'll be relationship strains and tensions and difficulties.

Of course, there will be all these things. But that's part of the relationship together. And likewise, when we enter into relationship with the Lord, then there are going to be rough periods to the journey.

There are going to be dark days as well as days of sunshine. But the point is, that whilst the broken spirit dryeth the bones, a many heart doeth good like a medicine.

If a heart is able to be strong and cheerful through all these things, then, of course, one is sustained even in the darkest days.

[8 : 19] One of the books I've been reading recently, as well as other ones, of course, but this is a, you could say secular book, an autobiography of a musician that I used to like in my teens.

And looking back, I wonder what on earth did I ever see in his music or in his lyrics. It's all pretty dark. And whilst the autobiography is largely narcissistic and chaotic and completely worldly, this particular musician, who we could say married three times, and the first time, yes, he probably loved her enough, and so on.

The second one's very, probably very, shall we say, a chaotic kind of relationship. It didn't seem to bring him much joy. But when he comes to his third, and so far, final wife, the tone of writing is completely different, because he then, he tells all his close friends, he tells his father, with whom he has quite a close relationship, and who's had a similar kind of chaotic life to himself, that everything in his life is different.

He is clearly, completely, totally, totally in love, which you didn't get with any of the previous descriptions of any of his previous relationship. This one, you could say, is almost for real.

And the way that he writes about it is completely different. And the tone of the love that he gives is completely different. There's a sort of baseline contentment to it, of course, like all human relationships.

[9 : 45] Even the best of them, although you couldn't necessarily say this is going to be that, but the best of them is eventually going to be broken, is eventually going to be, you know, going to end.

Because even if you, say, have contented together, married together, 70 plus years, eventually, one of you is going to be taken away from the other. And the deeper the love and the longer the relationship, the harder the parting is going to be.

Because all human and earthbound joy is only ever going to be passing. It cannot be eternal in that sense.

Only the Lord is eternal. And in that sense, only the Lord can give that baseline foundational contentment, which despite all that comes against us in the world, that which will sustain us, which will give us essentially the many hearts, and that doesn't mean so artificially happy, pulling crackers and playing music all the time, but rather that which has that contentment, which is enabled to be a cheerful spirit.

It does good like a medicine, not necessarily primal primalities to the person themselves. But if we have that cheerful spirit, that upbeat, that many heart, we do good to others without even necessarily realizing it.

[11 : 09] Remember that the woman that you mentioned in the previous congregation was surprised that this was what we had felt giving her this card, saying how much we appreciated her cheerfulness and how she was always like a tonic, a many heart, do it good like a medicine.

And she seemed a little surprised, but delighted to get it. But she didn't think of herself that way. She'd been through an awful lot in her life. She'd certainly suffered quite a lot in her life. But here she was, a comparatively late convert to the faith, and full of it, full of the love, the joy, the contentment of the Lord, and that many heart did good like a medicine, whether or not to herself, but certainly to others who encountered it and who are conscious of it.

At the end of the day, notice how it says, like a medicine. Why do you give people medicine? Why do you give anyone medicine? If a child is coughing, you give it a mixture and so on.

If it's not feeling well, you give it some kind of other tablets or cough mixture or any kind of medicine. You do medicine because somebody is sick. Somebody who is perfectly well doesn't say, I'm a bit bored today.

I'll go and take some medicine. No, you take medicine when you're ill. But what is the condition that needs medicine? That is our normal condition. Our fallen condition needs medicine.

[12 : 30] Our normal condition is broken. It is fallen. It is incomplete. And whilst, of course, there are those whose lives have just received blow after blow after blow and negativity throughout their life, you could understand, perhaps, why somebody like that might be bitter against the Lord and say, what has God ever done for me?

You know, everything in my life has been bad and everything's against it. Well, such a soul needs the Lord, needs the joy of the Lord to give their life some joy and some injection of his power, his grace, his joy, more than anything.

But I think even sadder than that, are those that I've certainly come across over the years and strangely often seems to be men, not always, but often men, who are just completely content with themselves.

You know, they're completely at ease. They think they're pretty good, they're great, you know, they'll talk endlessly about themselves and about what they do and what they've done in their lives and how they achieve this, they've achieved that, completely content with themselves and because everything has been so good, don't see any need for the Lord at all.

Like somebody who is contentedly sick and doesn't even know they're dying. A merry heart doeth good like a medicine. When we have that foundational joy, it is that which other people will pick up on.

[13 : 56] They will pick up on and they'll sense that this is something that they really want. they really need because however blasey or self-contented even the most worldly, secular, successful guy might be, he will know deep down that there is something missing and what people need, what the need of the human conditioned soul is, is that completeness, that joy, which is ultimately only found in the Lord.

Now, it says a merry heart. Now, this is one of the things we have to watch or leave it in Scripture is that nine times out of ten, most of the occasions when the word merry is used in Scripture, it is often, either sadly or, you know, interestingly, whatever, associated with drink.

Where there is, some of these, heart is merry, it's often because they've been taking, taking liquor, taking alcohol, but not always. It's not for nothing that Paul writes to the Ephesians, chapter 5, verse 18, be not drunk with wine when it is excess, but be filled with the Spirit.

That kind of Spirit, capital S, gives you a joy, gives you a merry heart, which ultimately all the libations or all the intoxicants of the world can never give.

If you want to be joyful, speak to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, you know, making melody in your heart to the Lord. As James says, if you want to be merry, sing psalms, sing to the Lord and let the Lord be your joy, the Lord be your strength.

[15 : 39] We tend to think that we can only have joy in this world if we find it in either riches or wealth or power or perhaps relationships or whatever it may be.

But as we said, all these things are ultimately passing away. The real lasting joy is like what Mary sings about in the Magnificat.

Luke chapter 1, we read from verse 46, Mary said, My soul doth magnify the Lord and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour.

This is her joy. This is the girl, and she probably was just a girl, who was about to be a public spectacle by becoming with child when she clearly was not yet married and in that culture and that time in society, that could be literally a death sentence.

But she sings, for he hath regarded the low estate of his handmaiden. He saw, in other words, that I was nothing, I was cast down, and was lowly. For behold, from henceforth all generations shall come he blessed.

[16 : 46] For he that is mighty hath done to me great things, and holy is his name. And his mercy is on them that fear him from generation to generation.

Now, we read that song or that praise and we think, yep, okay, this is mainly praising the Lord, but notice what she says. His mercy is on them that fear him from generation to generation.

It's not just for her, it's not just for the apostolic age or the age when Christ is himself alive on the earth or even alive in the womb of the virgin. Generation to generation, every rising and passing generation, those that fear the Lord, love the Lord, seek the Lord, his mercy is on them and they will have that joy that Mary speaks about, the joy that is in her.

Likewise, there's, of course, parallels between Mary's song of praise and that of Hannah way back in the Old Testament. 1 Samuel 2, verse 1, Hannah prayed and said, my heart rejoiceth in the Lord.

My horn is exalted in the Lord. My mouth is enlarged over my enemies because I rejoice in thy salvation. Notice how many, how many times joy is there in that single verse.

[18 : 06] my heart rejoiceth in the Lord. My horn is exalted in the Lord. My mouth is enlarged over my enemies because I rejoice in thy salvation. Her joy is in her maker.

Her joy is in the Lord who's answered her prayer, who has blessed her. In Nehemiah, of course, when they build the walls and when they have been surrounded by their enemies, Nehemiah then gives these instructions.

He said unto them, go your way, eat the fat, drink the sweet, send portions unto them for whom nothing is prepared. For this day is holy unto our Lord. Neither be ye sorry for the joy of the Lord is your strength.

And there's, I think, there's a clue of what really gives us the merry heart that does good like a medicine because the heart by nature is sick.

The soul by nature is dying. It is at enmity with God. Our condition is fallen, separated from God and all the self-contentment and all the self-aggrandizement and all the self-achievement in the world cannot bridge that divide, cannot fill that hole.

[19 : 18] Ultimately, our true joy is not even in the greatest of human lives. It is in the love of the Lord. That's what makes the heart glad. That's what makes the heart merry.

And the contrast with the broken spirit is the broken spirit, yes, we all experience at times, but the Lord does not leave us in that condition.

You know, Mary in her song pretty much acknowledges she was cast down, she was low, she was nothing. He has regarded the lowest state of his handmaid. He's lifted her up and given her this unique privilege.

And Hannah, who was childless and really down about it and being tormented by her rival, Elkanah's other wife, and just in misery, the Lord takes her out of that misery.

Her broken spirit is healed and her heart is made merry and rejoicing because of the love of the Lord. Psalm 119, verse 111, we read, Thy testimonies have I taken as an heritage forever, for they are the rejoicing of my heart.

[20 : 29] This is what ultimately makes the heart joyful. It is the knowledge that our baseline, our foundation is that which cannot be shaken.

The love of the Lord that is in there is a love for us, a love for sinners, which even when we fail, you know, I haven't got the opportunity to turn up a precise page, you know, but you know, when you think of David and Nathan the prophet, when Nathan the prophet tells him the story about the man and the little ewe lamb and how the rich man killed the ewe lamb and served it up to his guest and David's full of rage and said, oh, he's going to restore fourfold the lamb and he's going to have to pay for this because he did this thing because he had no pity and Nathan says, thou art the man and David is stricken by his own guilt and he says, you know, I've sinned against the Lord and Nathan says, right over the Lord has put away your sin you shall not die but not bear dead not for this because although the sin is real and although that's the reason Nathan confronts David with it and although fearfully the child itself perishes and dies

David himself the Lord still has plans for him the Lord has put away your sin your sin is no less real my sin is no less real every believer's sin is no less real but where they are concerned the Lord has put away your sin the Lord has nailed it to his cross before ever we were conceived in the wombs of our parents for from all eternity the Lord knew those who would be his and the Father and the Son and the Spirit arranged between them for all eternity that the Son would become human flesh in the womb of the Virgin that he would live that perfect life that he would give that atoning sacrifice on the cross he would go to the cross so that the price could be paid so that the Lord could say to every penitent sinner the Lord has put away your sin and this joy this foundational joy sometimes the Lord brings us low to make us appreciate the joy that we have in him just as sometimes the Lord allows bad things to happen to us to make us appreciate how much better life is most of the time you know when the

Israelites are hungry in the desert eventually the Lord feeds them but first of all he lets them learn that man does not live by bread alone sometimes the Lord lets bad things happen so we think well most of the time actually these bad things don't happen most of the time the Lord keeps us and protects us maybe we were forgetting maybe we were getting a bit complacent maybe we just needed reminding of how good the Lord is to us all the rest of the time sometimes he does that but a merry heart that which has the foundation of that love and security and protection the heart that spills over with the knowledge that they are safe they are secure in the love and in the arms of the Lord that cannot help but shine out with that joy and that joy if it isn't completely infectious certainly it touches and makes an impression on those whom it encounters and they come away thinking it's always good when you meet that person you always feel better after you speak to that person they do you like a tonic how many heart do of good like a medicine we are in need of medicine we are in need of the cure which only the good physician can give a broken spirit ride the bones that's the alternative a spirit that isn't healed a spirit that stays broken a life that stays incomplete in psalm 16 we read

I will bless the Lord who hath given me counsel my reins also instruct me in the night I have set the Lord always before me because he is at my right hand I shall not be moved therefore my heart is glad and my glory rejoiceth my flesh also shall rest in home my heart is glad a merry heart doeth good like a medicine thou wilt show me the path of life in thy presence is fullness of joy at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore you see there is no point pretending the world doesn't have a certain amount of joy and joyful things in it of course it does but these things are from the Lord they are intended to be used and rightly used and appreciated and used as a means and a source of thanksgiving the Lord gives us every good gift that we have every good and perfect gift as James says cometh down from the father of lights with whom there is neither variable nor shall turn we ought to be thankful to him but what it points us to is the greater fulfillment the greater love the greater joy the greater security and delight and pleasures for evermore that are at the right hand of the Lord a merry hearts a heart that knows these things cannot help but be joyful cannot help but bubble up with this knowledge and that is in itself attractive in the sense that it attracts people to that which they see such a person to have and they want what that person has they may not want the God that goes with it they may not want the Christ who is the source but they want that joy they want that merry heart and they want the source of it if maybe they can have it on their own terms but eventually there will come a day when even the most stubborn soul that they're prepared to submit will give their all that they might receive all and then they too will have that merry heart that doeth good like a medicine but a broken spirit drieth the bones we are like without the Lord we are like

[26 : 47] Ezekiel's vision the valley of the dry bones before the Lord begins to act on them we are dead in trespasses and sins without the Lord but when he comes upon us when he comes in his power and brings together the shaking bone to his bone and the flesh and the sinews come and then he breathes his spirit and have come from the four winds of breath and breathe upon these slain that they might live and they stood up upon their feet and exceeding great army and that army what would it have in its heart would have the joy of the Lord in its heart the strength and power the merry heart that doeth good like a medicine that I would suggest to you friends is something that we ought to pray for I know we can't study it into reality we can't make ourselves artificially joyful but perhaps we ought to recognize and realize that which we do have that which the Lord has given us that we don't have a reason not to have this joy not to have this bubbling up delight in the Lord because he has purchased salvation for us he has paid the price of our sin we are secure in his arms and in his love and in his deliverance if we are trusting in Christ you might think oh yeah but I might fall away

I don't like to be presumptuous and so on we cannot be plucked out of his hand if we are truly his oh well but maybe I'm not truly his then just love the Lord more and never let go of him keep loving the Lord and know that he already loves you keep going on with the Lord never turn aside to the right hand or the left keep your heart focused upon him and that heart will be joyful it will be merry and to our brokenness and to our wounded spirit it will do good like a medicine because the joy of the Lord is your strength and the heart that is blessed will do good will be blessed not only in time but for all eternity let us pray you